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Minority languages, language planning and audiovisual translation

Reglindis De Ridder and Eithne O’Connell

This chapter highlights often underestimated links between the fields of minority language (ML) media studies, sociolinguistics and translation studies. In doing so, it seeks to clarify key concepts relating to minority languages, language planning and policy (LPP) and audiovisual translation (AVT). It is hoped that drawing close attention to the past and current experience of minority languages will raise awareness of issues also of relevance to small, and many major languages, since they too are becoming minoritized in a world dominated by global English (Cronin 2003). The discussion is as wide-ranging as possible, within the inevitable space constraints, and draws on examples from around the world, while also addressing the European situation and the case of minority languages within the European Union. In an effort to avoid crude generalizations about minority languages and AVT, attention is drawn to the part played by such relevant variants as the asymmetry between individual language pairs; the implications of translation direction, i.e. translation into versus translation from a minority language; the relative language planning impact of various AVT modes and technologies; and the sociolinguistic needs of specific ML audiences.

Background

Thirty years ago, Gideon Toury (1985) drew attention to the links between minority languages and translation theory. He pointed out that translation could help to preserve and develop a minority language, but argued that too much translation activity into the minority language could have a negative effect. This was taken up by Michael Cronin who, while accepting that minority languages ‘must translate continually in order to retain their viability and relevance as living languages’ (1995: 89), warned that translation may endanger ‘the very specificity of those languages that practice it’ (ibid.). The relative advantages and disadvantages of minority language translation in both directions were explored with particular reference to scientific, literary and audiovisual texts by Eithne O’Connell and John Walsh (2006), who showed that while inward translation may invigorate a minority
language and its culture, it may simultaneously challenge the language’s ability to coin terminology corresponding to new concepts requiring translation.

Moreover, translations are considered classical language contact situations (Baumgarten and Özçetin 2008, Becher et al. 2009, Veiga Díaz 2012), which can trigger linguistic interference and may eventually also result in language change. An example of how this phenomenon (Antonini 2008, Herbst 1994) has also been identified in AVT is so-called dubbese. Three decades after Toury’s remarks, issues relating to minority languages have still not moved into the mainstream of translation studies, although there has been a discernible growth in interest among scholars, over the last 20 years, particularly relating to the study of minority/ized languages, LPP and AVT (e.g. Antonini 2009, Armstrong and Federici 2006, Barambones et al. 2012, Bassols et al. 1995, Bueno Maia et al. 2015, De Ridder 2015, De Ridder and O’Connell 2018; Federici 2009, 2011; Fernández Torné and Matamala 2015, Folaron 2015, Kothari 1999, 2008; Kothari et al. 2004, Kruger and Rafapa 2002, Kruger et al. 2007, Lysaght 2010, Meylaerts 2011; O’Connell 1994, 1998, 2003; O’Connell and Walsh 2006, Remael and Neves 2007, Remael et al. 2008, Sanday Wandera 2015, Zabalbeascoa 2001).

Toury’s point that too much unidirectional translation into a minority language may do more harm than good is well made. Yet, in the audiovisual industry, current post-production practices would suggest that the vulnerability of minority languages exposed willy-nilly to AVT is not generally understood. Take the example of the bilingual film Kings (2007). Although set in the UK, it tells the story of a group of Irish labourers, who converse with each other in their native tongue, Irish Gaelic. As O’Connell (2007a) has observed, having the main players speak their first language, which is a minority one even in their own country, is a useful filmic device to emphasize their cultural marginalization in the great colonial metropolis of London. Interestingly, the film in its original form incorporates English subtitles as an integral part from the outset. For Irish and English Anglophones, it may be attractively exotic to watch such a ‘foreign’ film made, unusually, in a neighbouring minority language.

One might think that integrating minority language translation into audiovisual productions such as this represents a win-win situation, certainly from the distributor’s point of view: such works have a positive novelty value for major language speakers, while bolstering the self-image of the minority language speakers, who are so rarely portrayed in mainstream media. Be that as it may, it is unlikely that a sociolinguist, especially one interested in LPP, would see this bilingual phenomenon so positively. Certainly, minority languages benefit in terms of visibility from representation in prestigious audiovisual media such as film and television (see also Kruger et al. 2007 with regard to African minority languages). However, close scrutiny of the impact of the use of subtitles to translate from a minority language like Irish into a major language, such as English, shows that while the minority language viewers may enjoy their medium of expression achieving some prominence on the big screen, the benefit is simultaneously offset since the Irish language is overwritten once again by the dominant neighbouring language, in whose shadow and sphere of influence it continually struggles to survive. It is unlikely the decision to integrate English subtitles in Kings was motivated by anything more than the wish to reach a wider audience. Indeed, there is little evidence that the audiovisual industry as a whole has any particular interest in or understanding of the implications, either for major or minority languages, of the translation decisions it routinely makes. Audiovisual media, therefore, is a field where translation and sociolinguistics scholarship can make an important contribution by examining cause and effect and alerting both the industry and audiences to their findings.

Nor is it simply within the audiovisual industry that minority language translation and language planning issues and implications are frequently overlooked. As observed by Albert Branchadell (2011), most significant reference works in translation studies produced
to date have not even thought of minority languages as a topic worthy of an entry or a substantial mention. Notable exceptions include Cronin’s chapter ‘Minority’ in the second edition of Baker and Saldanha’s *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Cronin 2009) and the *Handbook of Translation Studies* (Gambier and Van Doorslaer 2011), in which Branchadell’s piece on ‘Minority Languages in Translation’ appears. O’Connell (2007c) discusses minority languages in her chapter on AVT in Kuhíwcza and Littau’s *The Companion to Translation Studies*. Also worth mentioning is the special issue of *The Translator* entitled ‘Translation and Minority’ (Venuti 1998). Ten years later in 2009, a new international translation studies journal, *mTm Journal*, was launched welcoming publications on translation from major into minor languages and vice versa, but also translation between minor languages. More recently, Debbie Folaron (2015) edited a special issue of the *Journal of Specialised Translation* entitled ‘Translation and Minority, Lesser-used and Lesser-translated Languages and Cultures’, which also includes papers on AVT.

Language planning is an area of study within sociolinguistics, which has also been slow to attract significant scholarly attention within translation studies. The term ‘language planning’ describes specific, deliberate interventions designed to provide linguistic support to a particular speech community, although it can be said that failing to intervene deliberately in practice also constitutes a language plan or policy of sorts. Such interventions may work either bottom-up, i.e. they may be community-generated, or top-down, i.e. when they are implemented by an authority such as a national body. The term in question has been expanded by Ricento (2000) into the more inclusive ‘language planning and policy’ (LPP). Policy, whether viewed as part of language planning or in addition to it, usually relates to more comprehensive measures intended to support or, in certain cases, restrict an individual language or set of languages and, as such, tends to be implemented by a government or other administrative body, i.e. top-down. Not surprisingly, LPP is frequently associated with languages so small and endangered that they, unlike world languages and some major languages, cannot rely on a laissez-faire approach to their speakers and linguistic resources to guarantee the continued existence and use of the language into the future.

For simplicity and convenience, overviews of LPP often focus on interventions relating to status, corpus and acquisition or usage (O’Connell and Walsh 2006). Research in minority language translation has shown that audiovisual media can impact on all types of language planning. Examples of how children’s programmes in Basque were used in corpus planning, e.g. language standardization, have been provided by Barambones (2012), while Bassols et al. (1995) and Zabalbeascoa (2001) have described two contrasting approaches to minority language dubbing in Catalonia in the 1990s, each with different status, corpus and acquisition language planning implications. On the one hand, TVC, a Barcelona television station, acted as an agent promoting the Catalan standard recommended by the Institute of Catalan Studies (IEC), when translating the American children’s animation series *The Flintstones* (1960–1966). On the other hand, Valencia-based Canal 9 avoided standardizing trends and chose to use children’s informal street language as their linguistic guide when dubbing the same series.

Putting aside the socio-political tensions underlying the different approaches adopted in Barcelona and Valencia, it is clear, from a language planning perspective, how the two translation approaches enhanced the status of two different, potentially competing language varieties. By favouring one over the other, in each case, the dubbing teams also contributed to corpus development by favouring certain lexical and syntactic choices over others and, no doubt, accordingly influenced the language acquisition and usage of the respective audiences. This example is interesting because, for all that is written nowadays about globalization
and multilingualism, many sociolinguists researching LPP investigate language *per se* while overlooking translation. Likewise, their colleagues in media studies may study print and audiovisual media while overlooking the LPP underpinning the media in its various forms and the AVT practices adopted. Yet, as Reine Meylaerts (2011: 744) points out, there is ‘no language policy without a translation policy’ and it is on that basis, and in an effort to attract more attention to the scope for interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary research linking minority languages, LPP and AVT, that this topic is the focus of this chapter.

**Minority and minoritized languages**

**Minority languages**

One possible explanation for the past reluctance of many translation and sociolinguistics scholars to engage meaningfully with the issue of minority languages is the problematic nature of the term ‘minority language’. It may generally have negative and fixed connotations suggesting definitively that any given language either is, or is not a minority language and that minority languages, by definition, are disadvantaged and somehow inferior. Moreover, from a scholarly perspective, perhaps the greatest problem associated with the term ‘minority language’ is its lack of precision. Indeed, the phrase has multiple near-synonyms such as indigenous, aboriginal, autochthonous, minor and lesser-used language and, ironically, these terms together describe an estimated 90 per cent of the world’s total of 7,000 languages (Folaron 2015: 16). It must be noted that a sociolinguist may have a very different understanding of minority languages from the European Union, for example, or the Council of Europe. Thus, in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), regional or minority languages are narrowly defined as those that are traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state’s population; and different from the official language(s) of that state. The Charter explicitly excludes dialects and immigrant languages from its definition, presumably for political reasons, although from a linguistic perspective there can be many valid reasons to include them both. Furthermore, some definitions of minority languages include sign languages, while others do not.

Cronin (1995) has made a significant contribution to a reappraisal of the concept of minority by emphasizing that the asymmetric relationship between major and minority languages, expressed by the adjective ‘minority,’ is actually dynamic in nature. What many fail to appreciate is that, viewed across time, a minority language today may have been in the past, or become at some time in the future, a major language. Indeed, Irish Gaelic and English, which some hundreds of years ago enjoyed a similar status and number of speakers, are now located on opposite ends of the world/major/minority language continuum. English ranks as a world language with millions of mother tongue (L1) speakers and approximately as many again, who speak it as a second language (L2), while Irish is undisputedly an endangered minority language (O’Connell 2003). Similarly, what is deemed to be a minority language in one location may have a quite different status elsewhere at any time. Branchadell, drawing on Cronin’s insight that the concept of minority expresses ‘a relation not an essence’ (Cronin 1995: 86), thus makes a terminological distinction between, on the one hand, an ‘absolute minority language’ (Branchadell 2011: 97), namely a language that is not a major/ity language in any state, and, on the other hand, one that is a major/ity language in one or more territory, but also functions as a minority language elsewhere, e.g. German in Germany versus German in Belgium.
Branchadell (*ibid.*) demonstrates that the concept of minority language must be understood, not as fixed, but rather as relative, and relative not just in numerical, but also in historical, geographical and, it could be added, political and ideological terms. Now this insight needs to be further developed in order to make an additional distinction within so-called ‘absolute minority languages’ between what might be considered fairly typical minority languages and less typical ‘transitioning minority languages’. Typical minority languages are minority in relation to many key issues (e.g. small absolute numbers of speakers, limited domains of usage, etc.), while transitioning minority languages share only some of the typical characteristics of minority languages, as well as other characteristics more typical of small or major languages. A good example of the latter is Catalan, a language with more native speakers than the national language of another EU state, Denmark, and possibly destined to one day have its own independent national territory. In any case, the fundamental imprecision of the term ‘minority language’, coupled with the constantly changing dynamics of minority languages, whereby some are disappearing while others move towards greater official recognition, have not helped the development of a strong minority language focus within translation studies. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a significant growing interest in the topic over recent decades. It seems clear from a review of the literature within translation studies dealing with minority languages that current research, like this chapter, is firmly interdisciplinary, linking as it does minority/ized languages, LPP and AVT.

The renowned sociolinguist Joshua Fishman famously cautioned against the over-reliance of minority languages on the media (1991) and he accused some minority language activists of treating the mass media as a fetish (2001). To a certain extent, his point has been misunderstood: he believed that other foci, such as intergenerational transmission, were more important to the survival of minority languages than the media, not that media was of little importance. The year 1992 saw the publication of *Ethnic Minority Media* edited by Stephen Riggins, a collection of essays which drew attention to indigenous and minority languages, mainly in the Americas, and the positive role that modern media could play in their survival. More recently, scholars writing about media in languages as varied as Sami (Moring and Dunbar 2008) and Kashubian (Dolowy-Rybinska 2013) have grown in number, supporting each other’s research and giving rise to the emergence of minority language media (MLM) as a field of study in its own right (Cormack 2004, 2013, Cormack and Hourigan 2007). This led to the publication of such pioneering works as *Minority Language Media: Concepts, Critiques and Case Studies* (Cormack and Hourigan 2007) and *Social Media and Minority Languages: Convergence and the Creative Industries* (Gruffydd Jones and Uribe-Jongbloed 2013). In the former, O’Connell (2007b) makes the case for closer scrutiny of the role of language and translation within MLM, since it is not enough to simply *use* a minority language in the media. She argues that one must also be clear about what kind of language and translation mode is being used and to what end, e.g. which national variety in the case of pluricentric languages, standard versus dialects, formal versus informal registers, translated versus original material, open versus closed subtitles, subtitles versus dubbing, etc. Failure to consider these issues and the attendant language planning implications, when a minority or minoritized language is used in the audiovisual media, is likely to result in unintended effects (O’Connell 2013).

**Minoritized languages**

It is important that studies of minority languages do not ignore the plight of any other minoritized language, regardless of relative size. As mentioned in the introduction, even major
languages are now being minoritized in relation to English in an increasingly globalized world. For example, a numerically significant language such as Quechua, thought to have 13–14 million monolingual and bilingual speakers, is clearly minoritized in relation to Spanish in South America (Yataco 2015). This means that such languages are confronted with challenges, which are traditionally only associated with small or minority languages. Consequently, in minoritized language areas, the need is felt to engage in deliberate and focused language planning efforts such as, for example, deliberately creating terminology to correspond to foreign concepts (O’Connell and Walsh 2006), decreasing the exposure to foreign-language output in prime broadcasting time, and paying particular attention to the linguistic standard upheld in radio and television broadcasts (De Ridder 2015). Moreover, smaller languages must often rely on translation to supplement their linguistic, scientific and cultural resources, which is why language areas such as the Dutch and Scandinavian language areas, and indeed many minority language cultures are ‘translation cultures par excellence’ (Cronin 2003: 139).

More than half of the fiction published in such minoritized language areas, for instance, is imported foreign-language fiction translated into the minoritized language. By the same token, foreign-language films and television programmes are imported to supplement the original, native language output. As a result, language users in such language areas are generally exposed to more translations, and more specifically, modalities of audiovisual translation, such as interlingual subtitles, than to original, untranslated texts. This also implies a considerable exposure to translated language in general as well as the chosen linguistic standard of specific media. It follows that the linguistic decisions made by audiovisual translators may have implications for the ongoing development of such languages. This makes research into AVT particularly relevant from a sociolinguistic and language planning point of view.

**AVT as a language planning tool**

Before AVT began to emerge as a fully fledged discipline in the late 1990s, some research had already been conducted into the use of interlingual and intralingual subtitles as pedagogical tools in L2 acquisition in other fields (e.g. Price 1983, d’Ydewalle et al. 1991). Scholars such as Martine Danan (2004), Yves Gambier (2007), Robert Vanderplank (2010) and Eithne O’Connell (2011) provide overviews of this type of research. The literature suggests that the bimodal input (aural soundtrack and written subtitles) to which viewers are exposed in subtitled audiovisual material, proves particularly useful with regard to vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and literacy development. Much of this research has focused mainly on L2 acquisition. However, there is some evidence that subtitled audiovisual material can also be used in L1 language and literacy development.

Kothari et al. (2004: 23), for instance, explored ‘a simple and economical idea for infusing everyday television entertainment with reading and writing transactions’, using intralingual subtitles in film songs in India. They emphasized that the potential of such subtitles, not only in India, but also elsewhere is ‘enormous’ (ibid.). Jan-Louis Kruger launched similar projects in South Africa to develop literacy (Kruger and Rafapa 2002) and to promote multilingualism (Kruger et al. 2007) with the help of intralingual subtitles. Thus, research to date indicates that subtitling effectively increases audience exposure to print from early childhood, improving L2 acquisition, but also L1 literacy. Similarly, subtitling can also be used as a useful language planning tool in L1 maintenance, as well as in language revitalization and language development within minority language cultures.

However, scholars have also investigated largely unintended effects of translation and particularly AVT, in recent decades. Research has provided evidence of some side effects
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of translation (e.g. Anderman and Rogers 2005, Becher et al. 2009) and, in particular, AVT on small as well as major languages. Henrik Gottlieb (2004, 2012a) conducted research into Anglicisms in Danish subtitles and their implications for the Danish language. In relation to the impact of English on other languages, Gottlieb claimed that ‘there is no doubt that translations—not least those found in the popular media—constitute a driving force in what certain critics have seen as the corruption of domestic languages’ (2005: 176). He corroborated this with examples of the influence of English on Finnish (Sajavaara 1991), Spanish (Lorenzo 1996), and German (Herbst 1994, 1995) AVT. From a sociolinguistic point of view, this evidence supports the need for the systematic analysis of both original and translated texts in minority and minoritized languages, so as to gauge the impact of (audiovisual) translation on language change. In the aforementioned examples, only two modes of AVT were mentioned: subtitling (in Danish, Dutch, and Finnish) and dubbing (in Spanish and German). Without doubt, other modes of AVT, such as voice-over (e.g. in Poland), but also website, software and game localization, for instance, are also worthwhile objects of sociolinguistic research in this regard. The linguistic choices translators make in AVT modes could trigger language change, but also the mere choice of a given linguistic standard, for instance in the case of pluricentric language areas, could affect the linguistic prestige and the status of national varieties.

Pluricentric language areas, in which different national varieties co-exist, must indeed also be considered in this chapter. As Michael Clyne (1992: 405) explains, ‘[a]lmost invariably, pluricentricity is asymmetrical, i.e. the norms of one national variety (or some national varieties) is (are) afforded a higher status, internally and externally, than those of the others’. This is also reflected in the linguistic standard to which text producers—whether authors or translators—adhere. This can result in the linguistic standard of the dominant national variety being used, thus minoritizing the non-dominant varieties. Luise von Flotow (2009) explains that major Hollywood productions usually are first dubbed into French in Canada and a few months later, once again in France, since France—by law—cannot import French translations from abroad. What is remarkable, however, is that this does not result in a Canadian dubbed version in Canadian French, even though the primary target audience are Canadian French speakers. The variety of French they use endeavours to be unmarked for geographic region and as a result is a rather artificial, ‘International’ French, *le synchronien,* which does not convey realistically the orality expected of this AVT mode (*ibid*).

In literary publishing, usually only one translation is produced aiming at a whole pluricentric language area. In the whole Dutch language area, for instance, the Netherlandic Dutch standard is generally upheld in translation, which results in the publication of a single Netherlandic Dutch translation of foreign-language fiction. Unlike published fiction, however, several translated versions can be created, with relative ease, for audiovisual fiction in this language area, as films and television series are usually subtitled. This relatively cheap AVT mode facilitates the creation of separate Dutch subtitled versions on either side of the state borders to accommodate both Dutch and Belgian target audiences. Like most subtitling countries, however, dubbing is also a common AVT mode in the Dutch language area, although this AVT mode is reserved for children’s films and series. Until the mid-1990s, the Netherlandic Dutch dubbed version of these audiovisual products was imported into Belgium. Thus, Dutch-speaking children in Belgium could only watch the ‘foreign’, Netherlandic Dutch dubbed version of children’s animations and films. Nowadays, however, a separate Belgian Dutch (‘Flemish’) dubbed version is created and distributed for the Belgian market.

By contrast, a recent diachronic lexical analysis of interlingual television subtitles that specifically aimed at the Dutch-speaking Belgian audience, revealed that a higher number of marked Netherlandic Dutch lexis than marked Belgian Dutch lexis were found in this
written text type (De Ridder 2015). This is in sharp contrast with the significantly higher number of marked Belgian Dutch lexis found in intralingual subtitles, in which, since the year 2000, Netherlandic Dutch is only used if it is heard in the soundtrack (ibid.). Thus, linguistic choices in translated audiovisual texts may affect the quality of the translation mode, in that they do not convey the orality of the spoken varieties with which the target audience is familiar. Similarly, they may also exert an influence on the already lower prestige of ‘non-dominant’ (Muhr 2012) national varieties and the status of their translators, while depriving the wider language area of its full linguistic richness.

It follows that, as smaller and minority language communities continue to be exposed to a considerable amount of AVT, translators and translation editors-in-chief, as well as AVT policy makers, may play a valuable role in status, corpus, and acquisition planning. Sociolinguistic research into AVT policy, but also in-depth analysis of authentic AVT texts and untranslated texts are important here. Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine (2000) predicted that by the end of this century, 90 per cent of the world’s languages will have vanished. Since, as András Kornai pointed out, less than 5 per cent of all languages today is represented in the digital world, this could mean language death will be hastened by ‘digital language death’ (Kornai 2013). Today, this importance of electronic online media is already reflected in the new subfield of e-sociolinguistics that investigates language use in these media (Danesi 2015). In brief, there is good reason to regard AVT as a frequently underestimated, but potentially significant language planning tool, particularly in smaller and minority language areas.

An indication of its future trajectory and new debates

As minority language AVT is a relatively new area of study, it offers many interesting topics worthy of future investigation. Given the recent advances in technology, especially in the digital area, it is likely that AVT will become much more commonplace than it currently is. For many years now, Europe has endeavoured, for both economic and cultural reasons, to strengthen and develop an indigenous audiovisual industry to offset USA dominance. This has resulted in generous support for cross-border and multilingual co-productions. In recent decades, even that great monolingual bastion, Hollywood, increasingly has integrated subtitling into films. There have been more bilingual, trilingual and, indeed multilingual productions, with many English-language films even featuring minority or minoritized languages: Sioux Indians in Kevin Costner’s film *Dances with Wolves* (1990) spoke Lakota, which was subtitled into English, Dublin English in *The Commitments* (1991) and Glaswegian Scots in *Trainspotting* (1996). Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of Christ* (2004) had Jesus and his disciples speaking Old Aramaic, the Jewish authorities speaking Hebrew and the Romans speaking Latin. The award-winning international co-production *Babel* (2006) broke all linguistic records by including Berber, Arabic, English, Spanish, French, Japanese and Japanese Sign Language. However, some of these linguistic escapades were not exactly kosher. For example, the form of Lakota taught by the *Dances with Wolves* dialogue coach was actually appropriate only for women, and the Jewish authorities featured in *The Passion of Christ*, having returned from Babylonian captivity speaking Aramaic, would only have used Hebrew for religious purposes.

Nevertheless, these examples are indicative of a trend towards increasing use of AVT within the mainstream film industry, which is likely to strengthen in coming years. Nonetheless, it is not just on the big screen that an increase in minority language AVT can be expected. In the past, before digital advances made AVT an affordable option, the high cost
to minority language users of producing their own audiovisual material was often prohibitive. Now, it is possible to produce material, in the first instance for a small minority language audience, with the prospect of being able to offset some of the costs by selling on to a major language audience. An early example of this was the sale to NOS in the Netherlands of the Welsh soap opera *Pobal y Cym* (*De Vallei*) in 1991. The Welsh soundtrack was retained and subtitled into Dutch. In 2014, the Irish language Celtic Noir thriller series *An Bronntanas* (*The Gift*) was acquired by a major French international distribution company, Lagardère Entertainment (LE) Rights, so as to aim it at a worldwide audience (Murphy 2015). Another likely trend within the field will be increased use of AVT material to promote formal and informal minority language learning and literacy skills (O’Connell 2011). There is good reason to be optimistic about some of the pedagogical uses of subtitles, and indeed other AVT modes harnessed for similar purposes, e.g. using dubbing as a cost-effective way to provide children’s programmes in a minority language, rather than having to make much more costly original programmes (O’Connell 2003, 2007b, 2010, 2011; O’Connell and Walsh 2006). An example of this is the popular television series, *Katie Morag*, commissioned by BBC’s Cbeebies children’s channel and later dubbed into Scottish Gaelic or *Gàidhlig* as *Ceitidh Mòrag* for broadcast in 2014 on BBC ALBA.

However, notwithstanding the fact that the exposure of the speakers of minority, minoritized or smaller languages to large volumes of audiovisual translations can bring educational benefits and commercial savings to their communities, the same phenomenon of AVT, depending on variables such as translation mode, language pair and direction, can also potentially constitute a real threat to the very linguistic sustainability of their own speech communities (e.g. O’Connell 2011). A contemporary example, also from Scotland, is the plight of minority language adult viewers of BBC ALBA, who frequently find themselves having to watch material with soundtracks in their L1, Gàidhlig, but accompanied by open interlingual subtitles which transform the programme into an unbalanced bilingual offering, with the written English subtitles requiring more cognitive processing and therefore having more impact than the minority language aural soundtrack (O’Connell 2011, 2013). This phenomenon recently resulted in Gàidhlig-speaking viewers organizing themselves via a bilingual website to lobby the broadcaster for more sociolinguistically sensitive arrangements (Gàidhlig TV 2015).

**Common research methods associated with the particular area**

Although authentic sets of translated texts and their corresponding source texts have already been used in translation studies and AVT analysis, the future use of more sizeable corpora will enable thorough study of recurring linguistic features in (audiovisual) translations (e.g. Freddi 2013). These corpora are specifically designed to systematically investigate and draw generalizations from the language used in the authentic data in such corpora. With the development of corpus linguistics, vast linguistic reference corpora have been built, but also other types of corpora, such as parallel translation corpora and monolingual comparable corpora are also used in translation research. Corpus linguistics techniques increasingly are applied in AVT. It is to be expected that further technological advances will soon significantly boost this field of research.

Minority and minoritized languages, in particular, benefit greatly from such valuable linguistic resources as corpora. A number have already been created, e.g. the Crúbábádn corpora (Scannell 2007) covering texts in more than 2,000 smaller and minority languages extracted from the World Wide Web. Other examples are a 4.6-million-word corpus of
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twentieth-century Basque, the XX. Mendeko Euskararen Corpus, and the Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech (SCOTS), a 4-million-word corpus of Scottish English and varieties of Scots with a multimedia component (Anderson and Corbett 2008). Nonetheless, specific AVT corpora of regional and minority languages, such as the 300,000 word English-Galician interlingual subtitle corpus, Veiga (Sotelo Dios 2011), are currently rather rare. The creation of such AVT corpora that are representative of AVT in minority and minoritized languages and provide valuable empirical evidence of what happens in the language of AVT, can reveal to what extent this AVT has an impact on the wider language.

Nevertheless, a few noteworthy AVT corpora have been compiled. One such corpus is the Forlì Corpus of Screen Translation (Valentini 2008). Its current version FORLIXT 3.0 contains source and target text transcriptions of almost one hundred films and allows users to scan transcribed film dialogues, as well as to stream the corresponding film sequences. It consists of the dubbed target texts, as well as the source text covering mainly French, German, and Italian. The 500,000 word Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue (Pavesi et al. 2014) currently consists of a unidirectional parallel component of 24 English-language source texts alongside their dubbed Italian translations, as well as a component of transcribed original Italian film dialogues. The inclusion of such a component of untranslated, original material makes these corpora valuable resources, which also allow the study of translated language and how this differs from and affects the wider target language.

The Opus Corpus currently (OpenSubtitles2015) contains a substantial multilingual subtitle subset of almost 20 billion words in around 60 languages (Tiedeman 2012), many of which are smaller and minority languages. Parallel subtitle corpora have also been created for machine translation research (e.g. Armstrong et al. 2007). The SUMAT subtitle corpus (Petukhova et al. 2012) comprises some 20 million professional subtitles and was built to train Statistical Machine Translation systems to develop an automated subtitle translation service for nine European languages. It consists of intralingual subtitles and parallel subtitles. Yet, the importance of AVT is also reflected in the corpus design of balanced reference corpora. The 500-Million-Word Reference Corpus of Contemporary written Dutch (SoNaR) is a case in point. Reference corpora, which aim to be representative of the linguistic output of a given language area, cover a wide range of text types. The corpus builders of SoNaR included a total of 10 million subtitled words (Oostdijk et al. 2013), which illustrates that for such a corpus to be representative of the language of subtitling cultures like Dutch, it must include subtitles.

The influence of new technology on the area

Two examples of Audio Description (AD) corpora are the TIWO Corpus that consists of the English-language AD of 91 films (Salway 2007) and the Tracce Corpus (Jiménez and Seibel 2012, Jiménez Hurtado and Soler Gallego 2013), a Spanish-language AD corpus of some 300 films. Further development of information technology will enable even faster creation of such varied AVT corpora and a further refinement of corpus tools, allowing for quicker and more complex concordance searches. Searching soundtracks of dubbed material for specific pronunciation or intonation features could also reveal interesting changes in pronunciation in this audiovisual mode as opposed to non-translated dialogues. As information technology improves, it will also enhance the spread of more sophisticated multimodal corpora, in which users can scan concordance lines in the source or target text of AVT corpora and with a single mouse click have access to the corresponding section of the video file (Thompson 2010). This would be particularly useful in the lexical analysis of AVT to disambiguate polysemous words.
Large corpora are parsed and tagged automatically. A further refinement of such parsers and taggers would allow for more accurate lemma searches, which ideally also take into account geographical markedness. New statistical algorithms could automatically single out texts that are geographically marked. This means that no longer simply the country in which a given text is published is used to determine its origin, as this can be misleading (e.g. publishing houses may be located in one country but adhere to the linguistic standard of another country). Actual geographic markers present in the text can then determine its level of geographical markedness. Corpora that allow for ‘batch’ lemma searches of thousands of geographically marked lexical items or Anglicisms, which can be poured into the search engine would also be convenient to quickly investigate the geographic markedness of a given subset, or indeed the occurrence of Anglicisms.

In the 1980s and 1990s, eye movements were recorded to investigate reading behaviour in children and adults watching subtitled programmes (e.g. d’Ydewalle et al. 1991). In recent years, eye-tracking technology has improved considerably and eye trackers, although still expensive, have become easier to use. In translation studies, eye-tracking research methodology is applied to investigate translation processes and translator-computer interaction (O’Brien 2007, Saldanha and O’Brien 2013). By the same token, eye-tracking research has contributed to the study of the subtitle reading process and the processing effort involved (e.g. Kruger 2012, Kruger and Steyn 2013). Since subtitling is a common AVT method in minoritized languages, AVT research into subtitling using eye-tracking methods is a welcome development, as is clear from the contributions to a publication edited by Elisa Perego (2012) devoted entirely to this topic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although the study of minority language AVT and, more particularly, its language planning implications have been relatively slow to attract scholarly attention, the research conducted to date indicates that the field is now recognized as worthy of much closer scholarly attention. As many major and small languages become increasingly minoritized in relation to English, and possibly other emerging global languages, linguists are likely to value more and more the experience of and strategies used by minority language communities to maintain and develop their languages. Their research efforts in the future will be greatly facilitated by advances in computational and corpus linguistics. Given the prevalence, penetration and continuing expansion of audiovisual media, AVT can reasonably be expected to play a pivotal role both within individual communities and in assisting them in their interlingual interactions with others. Furthermore, as audiovisual products continue to displace written sources of information and entertainment, both intralingual and interlingual subtitles will play an important part in developing both ‘reading abilities and language skills’ (Gottlieb 2012b: 64).

Further reading


Kruger, J. and F. Steyn (2013) ‘Subtitles and Eye Tracking: Reading and Performance’, *Reading Research Quarterly* 49: 105–120 | A recent overview and critical discussion of the use of eye-tracking in research on subtitling processing and the educational benefits of this AVT mode.


**Related topics**

18 Sociolinguistics and linguistic variation in audiovisual translation  
20 Corpus-based audiovisual translation studies: ample room for development  
21 Multimodal corpora in audiovisual translation studies  
22 Eye tracking in audiovisual translation research  
30 Audiovisual translation in language teaching and learning

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Minority languages, language planning and AVT


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